



## ARTICLE

# Colonial Revolution and Liberatory War: from Communist to Post-Colonial Theory (Georgy Safarov, Mao Zedong and Frantz Fanon)

*Konstantin D. Bugrov*

Institute of History and Archaeology, Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences,  
Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

### ABSTRACT

The article investigates the intellectual roots of the concept of colonial revolution, which goes back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> congress of the Communist International, examines its importance in shaping the Communist political thought and outlines its subsequent transformation in the wake of post-colonial theory. The author starts with analyzing the political ideas of Georgy Safarov—*Comintern* [the Communist International] theorist. He was among the most original thinkers who elaborated the concept of colonial revolution. Safarov, drawing from his own experience in Central Asia, insisted that global capitalism is “retreating to the positions of feudalism” while operating in colonies, treating them as collective “serfs” and lacking any proper social basis save for its own enormous military force. Such analogy led Safarov to envisage the colonial revolution as a “plebeian” revolt and liberatory war against the inhumane and stagnant colonial order, opening the way for a non-capitalist development with certain assistance from the Soviet Union. Similar ideas were independently formulated by Mao Zedong in the 1930s. He saw colonial revolution in China as a “protracted war” of liberation and listed the conditions under which victory was possible. However, the subsequent development of a former colony was seen by Mao as a transitory period of “democratic dictatorship”. Similar ideas of colonial revolution as a liberatory peasant war and “plebeian” movement were developed by Franz Fanon in the context of his own war experience in Algeria. Developing the idea of “plebeian”, peasant revolt and justifying the violence as the sole means of ending the rule of colonial power, Fanon at the same time differed from the tradition

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[k.d.bugrov@gmail.com](mailto:k.d.bugrov@gmail.com)

of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Comintern* Congress (represented by Safarov, Mao and the others) while describing the independent existence of former colonies. For Fanon, the worst consequence of colonial rule is not permanent backwardness but psychological trauma, an inevitable result of a brutal conquest which requires therapy. The author concludes that such conceptual transformation was stimulated not merely by the disappointment in Soviet and Chinese economic strategies, but also in the geographical and cultural factor which made the reintegration with the former colonial powers preferable to the direct “escape” into the socialist camp.

#### KEYWORDS

colonial revolution; post-colonial studies; liberatory war; Georgy Safarov; Mao Zedong; Frantz Fanon

## Introduction

The relationship between Marxism and post-colonial intellectual paradigms was scrutinized many times (Moore-Gilbert, 2001; Wolfe, 1997). Of course, Marxism historically had many faces, and one of them was especially preoccupied with the colonial problematics based on the intellectual legacy of the Communist International and, speaking more broadly, the Communist thought. After the beginning of the First World War, the radical wing of Russian Socialist Democracy party (Bolsheviks) was consolidated around Vladimir Lenin in the anti-war, defeatist stance; Nikolay Bukharin was among the first who postulated that the military domination of developed Western countries in the colonies is unable to move the colonies forward in a violent but progressive way. At the same time, Lenin criticized Rosa Luxemburg, who thought that, besides revolutions, the era of imperialism cannot produce liberatory wars. To develop his arguments, Lenin together with Grigory Zinoviev published *Socialism and War* (1915/1931), where two types of just wars were defined: revolutionary wars (in respective periods of history, bourgeois states against feudal states, and proletarian states against bourgeois states) and national-liberatory wars; thus, even the war of colonial semi-feudal states against developed imperialist states could be justified:

If tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, India on England, Persia or China on Russia, and so forth, those would be “just”, “defensive” wars, irrespective of who attacked first; and every Socialist would sympathize with the victory of the oppressed, dependent, unequal states against the oppressing, slave-owning, predatory “great” powers. (Zinoviev & Lenin, 1915/1931, p. 5)

It was Lenin who developed “classical Marxist heritage on the national and colonial question” (White, 1976, p. 173). The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the political success of the Leninist strategy which called for an unconventional support

of national-liberatory movements eventually solidified the positions of such ideology and provided the basis for a political experiment, which historian Terry Martin called an “affirmative action empire” (Martin, 2001, p. 1).

The foundation of the Communist International (*Comintern*) finally formed the Communist perspective on the colonial question: the key formula of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the *Comintern* (1920) was the possibility of direct transition to socialism in colonies. As Grigory Zinoviev, one of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party, stated in 1920, from the moment of the revolution in Russia, “we can say that China, India, Turkey, Persia, Armenia can and ought also to begin the struggle directly for a socialist order” (White, 1976, pp. 180–181). There were considerable disagreements regarding the political and social strategy of the colonial revolution. Lenin insisted that the Communist movement in colonies might rely upon the alliance with “bourgeois-democratic liberation movements”, while Indian communist Manabendra Roy argued that support has to be reserved only for “revolutionary movements of liberation” (Haithcox, 1971, p. 11). Indeed,

anticolonialism was a diasporic production, a revolutionary mixture of the indigenous and the cosmopolitan, of situated local knowledges combined with universal political principles, constructed through international networks of party organizations, political contacts between different revolutionary organizations, and personal contacts between activists, generating common practical information with political and intellectual influences. (Young, 2003, p. 7)

Through the 1920s, the *Comintern* was engulfed in disputes on different aspects of the colonial revolution, spurred by the revolutionary events of the second half of the 1920s in China.

Post-colonial theory is often seen as a product of disappointment in the whole socialist and revolutionary project, strengthened by the demise of planned economy both in the USSR and China. When “uncertainty reigned as to what would follow in the wake of socialism” (Mueller, 2019, pp. 533–534), the attractiveness of Communism *per se* fell. Communist ideas remained among the intellectual sources of post-colonial theory. The key post-colonial thinkers like Gayatri Spivak not just readily used Marxist concepts and ideas, but also referred to Lenin, thus provoking harsh critique from figures like Neil Lazarus and Aijaz Ahmad, who were attacking post-colonial agenda as a sort of post-modernist attack over “universalism, rationalism and secularism” (Ahmad, 2011, p. 37), which was highly valued by classical Marxism. Another source of discontent is post-colonial theory’s emphasis on culture rather than economy. For instance, Benita Parry, inspired by Leo Trotsky’s ideas on “combined and uneven development”, criticized Gayatri Spivak and other prominent figures from the field of subaltern studies:

It is now impossible to overlook a strong impulse in the contemporary postcolonial discussion to find a middle ground between the terms “domination” and “oppression”, to define colonial relationships as generically ambivalent, and

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to represent colonial locations as always and necessarily the site of dialogue. A tendency to privilege the cultural assimilation sought and achieved by colonial elites over popular resistance to colonial violence is both ahistorical and morally vacant in its detachment from the outrages visited on the dispossessed. (Parry, 2002, p. 144)

Or, as some contemporary Marxist critics of post-colonial agenda put it, “exploitation cannot be transformed by producing alternative representations or interpretations” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale et al., 2018, p. 153).

This article focuses on the history of an important concept that emerged within the vast intellectual heritage of the *Comintern*—the concept of colonial revolution. Such historical inquiry allows us not only to learn better the origins and genesis of the intellectual framework within which the colonial system was dismantled, but also to uncover some of the historical roots of the post-colonial thought, and to provide an explanation of its break with the revolutionary and Communist thought as it was developed by Lenin and the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Comintern* Congress. To proceed with the analysis, we must make one more important distinction between different traditions in the Communist thought. We may roughly outline three key lines in which loosely understood Communism influenced the theories and ideas about the colonial revolution and subsequent independent development of former colonies.

The first tradition could be referred to as *hegemonist* and is based upon the intellectual legacy of Antonio Gramsci. Even though Gramsci himself did not pay special attention to the problem of colonial revolution (he actually saw Italy in terms of colonial subjugation, as industrially developed North commanding the peasant South), his reflection on the reciprocal and complex character of political power, described within the concept of hegemony, proved to be quite valuable to describe the experience of colonial rule as well. The Gramscian notion of hegemony heavily influenced post-colonial studies in Asia and Latin America, and, although the source of Marxist influence in Indian subaltern studies were Edward Thompson and Victor Kiernan, it was Gramsci who emerged by the late 1980s as one of the key names of the new intellectual current (Brennan, 2001, pp. 150–152). Gramsci was also interpreted in non-Marxist contexts, for example, in the writings of Norberto Bobbio. Still, Gramsci belongs to the Communist tradition; Gramscianism could be considered an intellectual apology for the inability to wrestle the power by means of revolt; rather, it gave preference to a “long march” in order to culturally overweight capitalism. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and with the influential additions by authors like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, these broadly understood Gramscian ideas became a dominant force in the European left.

The second is the Orthodox Leninist thought represented by different types of the USSR-inspired communist movements across the world, especially in the intellectual production of the different wings of the ruling Communist party in the USSR. Being definitely sympathetic to the “wretched of the Earth”, this version of Communism was always ready to turn to them by its other side, namely, the cold and cynical Machiavellian calculation of (economic) power. A follower of Leo Trotsky,

American communist Ted Grant stated in 1964: “The idea of leaning on the peasant masses, of the ‘revolutionary elements with nothing to lose’ and of the lumpen proletariat as a revolutionary force, superior to the ‘respectable industrial proletariat’ which has a higher standard of living, as the decisive force in the revolution, is the idea of Bakunin and not of Marx or Trotsky” (Grant, 1964).

While Trotskyism generally dismissed the peasant movements in colonies, its stance was paradoxically close to the intellectual positions of the official Moscow, the self-proclaimed death enemy of Trotskyism: an arrogant idea of superiority based on its economic strength. The psychological problems in dealing with Moscow are summarized in Enver Hodzha’s diatribes against “khrushchevites”: he was blaming the Soviet leaders for their arrogant behavior and disdain for Albania’s needs. The economic advice from Moscow were seen by Hodzha as an attempt to humiliate the underdeveloped countries:

You are not exact in your planning. The hydro-power station is costing you an enormous amount and you won’t know what to do with the current. Likewise, you have planned to build unnecessary factories, like those for steel, timber-processing, paper, glass, linseed, bread, etc. Does Albania need all these factories? Why are you building the refinery? The question of agriculture is critical, therefore reduce your investments in industry and strengthen agriculture! (Hoxha, 1980, pp. 70–71)

Indeed, the political program of Bolshevism in the 1920s shifted to the ambitious task of economic rivalry with the capitalism, which the Soviet state pursued with certain, if limited, success. There Communism as a science of political-economic domination risked being dissolved in the general stream of modernization theories. Immanuel Wallerstein remarked: “We could say that the Stalinist version of the theory of stages simply changed what state represented the model: the Soviet Union became the model state instead of Great Britain. But the idea that there was a model, and that each state must follow more or less parallel routes, was epistemologically the same, notwithstanding the political difference” (Stame & Meldolesi, 2019).

And even though former colonies were seen by Red Moscow with sympathy in their anti-imperialist struggle, they were treated as inferior in terms of technological and industrial development, way behind the unparalleled Soviet power; the understanding of colonial revolutions was deployed to mark the difference between developed (that is, both capitalist and socialist) and undeveloped countries.

The third tradition emerged from the more radical understanding of the resolutions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Comintern* Congress by the authors especially interested in discovering the condition under which the success of revolution in a colony would depend primarily upon the actual political and military qualifications of the revolutionary movement itself. As Laclau and Mouffe emphasized, the key moment in the transformation of the Leninist paradigm of Marxism came when it encountered the endless variety of peripheral popular movements:

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While implicitly retaining the notion of hegemony as a merely external alliance of classes, the new strategy conceived democracy as a common ground which was not open to exclusive absorption by any one social sector. A number of formulas—ranging from Mao’s “new democracy” to Togliatti’s “progressive democracy” and “national tasks of the working class”—attempted to locate themselves on a terrain that was difficult to define theoretically within Marxist parameters, since the “popular” and the “democratic” were tangible realities at the level of the mass struggle but could not be ascribed to a strict class belonging [...] From China to Vietnam or Cuba, the popular mass identity was other and broader than class identity. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 62)

The encounter happened exactly on the premises of the *Comintern*, but there was a serious difference between Mao and Togliatti. In Italy, the Communist Party operated as a legal force aimed at political struggle, in terms of either the Leninist struggle for power or Gramscian “long march” for hegemony, while in China the Party was engaged in the war against the foreign occupation. This national-liberatory momentum was downplayed or even missing in both Leninist and Gramscian visions of Marxist political philosophy, but for the colonies it was the most important part. The complex interaction of “class” and “mass” in the context of liberatory struggle was the intellectual focal point where the Marxism went colonial and, subsequently, post-colonial. It was associated with the violent movements within the New Communism, and typically, this intellectual current is characterized as distinctly critical towards both European Socialist Democracy and the Soviet model of Leninism. There were debates in Latin America between the *foquistas* or *guevaristas* and their fewer radical opponents like Vania Bambirra in relation to how exactly organize a rebellion (Briceno Ramirez, 2016). The ideas of “urban guerilla” and other radical concepts of partisan war might be seen as by-products of this tradition. It was the tradition which frightened Carl Schmitt to such an extent that he devoted a full-scope study, *Theory of the Partisan* (2007), to the attack on this tradition, which he saw as the biggest threat to the international order. Indeed, it was the partisan, rather than the critically-thinking intellectual or engineering economic planner, that played key role there.

The three key traditions of the Communist thought developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were considering the revolution of disputed hegemony, economic build-up, and liberatory war. Each of them had a certain impact upon the development of the colonial (and post-colonial) agenda. However, originally it was the third tradition that was dealing specifically with the problems of socialist revolution in a colony. This allows to specify the scope of the present article: it deals with the intellectual impact of the third tradition, a certain part of the larger Communist (Leninist) body of thought which, in its own turn, was a part of the global Marxist thought. The theories of the Third International were incorporated into the body of anti-colonial liberatory thought already in the 1920s when the attention of the *Comintern* was attracted to Asia and, particularly, to China. The development of this tradition was driven forward by the experience of the actual military (rather than political) struggle in the colonies, inevitably merging the concepts of liberatory revolution and liberatory war. Thus, the

issue of colonial revolution—that is, the revolution in an undeveloped country under the military influence of capitalist powers, which is capable of overcoming not merely its own backwardness but also the military superiority of the metropoly—emerged as a problem of liberatory warfare. At that time, the key questions were formulated: first, how could the revolution in a colony succeed both socially (since there is no proletariat) and militarily (since capitalism is powerful)? Second, how could a newly emerged state be independent and avoid succumbing to the economic power of imperialists and, so to say, deal with what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri called “the poisoned gift of national liberation”?

The body of theoretical works, political proclamations and methodological approaches developed within the *Comintern* during the Interbellum was enormous, and this is even more true in relation to anti-colonial and New Communism writings of the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is beyond the scope of the present article to cover it all. I would concentrate on three figures of greatest prominence: I start with Georgy Safarov, a prominent but almost forgotten figure in the Bolshevik Party of the 1920s who in 1921–1931 elaborated perhaps the most interesting theory of colonial revolution. Then I will discuss the political concepts of protracted war developed by Mao Zedong. The final part of the article deals with Frantz Fanon and his theory of revolution in Africa. Why these figures? Many Soviet theorists tried to find in the *Comintern's* resolutions some ideas about the colonial revolution, but Safarov was the first Soviet author who took the colonial theory seriously, as well as the most original thinker among Soviet intellectuals who discussed the subject; it was Safarov who provided the detailed argumentation in support of Lenin's insights about the national-colonial question. In the 1930s, the *Comintern*, following Moscow's political aspirations, oriented itself towards Europe rather than Asia and Africa; and the whole colonial agenda receded into the background. Still, the colonial agenda was elaborated by the Chinese Communists; this subsequent development of the *Comintern's* ideas regarding the revolution in a colony is researched through the intellectual heritage of Mao Zedong. After the Second World War, a full-scale anti-colonial movement emerged, supported both by the USSR and the revolutionary China. This period provides plenty of figures to choose from. Robert Young once stressed that theoretical and political identification of post-colonial theory “goes back to the works of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara” (Young, 2003, p. 7). Unfortunately, Fanon's relations with the preceding *Comintern* and anti-colonial tradition is often overlooked; for instance, in the recent and otherwise illuminating book on Fanon's thought, *Frantz Fanon, Postcolonialism and the Ethics of Difference* by Azzedine Haddour, the *Comintern* legacy or at least Lenin's ideas are not mentioned as if there was no decades of anti-colonial thought and action in the period of the 1920s–1950s based upon the *Comintern* resolutions and subsequent experience of liberatory wars; instead, Fanon is directly compared with the “Marxist orthodoxy” (Haddour, 2019, pp. 160–161; Salem, 2018, p. 429). The present article aims, above all, at filling this gap. Thus, the three selected figures shed light on the changes which the concept of colonial revolution endured at different times and in different places. We should, however, keep in mind the general problem—the trajectory of the concept's travel from the Communist to post-colonial



paradigm of thinking or, in other words, how the concept that originally developed within the third tradition of Communist thought became associated with the first, Gramscian tradition.

Of course, there were certain mutual influences between these thinkers: they all were borrowing from the intellectual legacy of Lenin and the *Comintern*, in which Safarov himself played an important role and which influenced both Mao and Fanon. However, this article is aimed not at uncovering “intellectual genealogy” (Safarov’s influence on Mao, Safarov and Mao on Fanon, etc.), but rather at investigating the similarities and differences in the deployment of concepts, originally elaborated in the period of the First World War, Russian Revolution of 1917 and the foundation of the *Comintern* in 1919. Such deployment occurred in different locations and under different circumstances: that is, Safarov’s experience of supporting indigenous peoples in their struggle against Russian colonists in Central Asia amidst the Civil War; Mao’s action in North-western China as an actual military leader fighting Japanese invasion; and Fanon’s experience in Algeria as a leading theorist of the liberatory war against France. No doubt, Safarov’s situation was peculiar, since in Central Asia there was in fact a revolution “from above” rather than a liberatory war; yet in a broader sense, all these cases could be seen as revolutions in colonies, which were theorized with the help of conceptual tools derived from the resolutions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the *Comintern*.

Thus, the article aims to demonstrate how the very idea of revolution in a colony was developed in several important contexts, traveled through several locations, eventually becoming a foundation for the theory of liberatory war and the basis for the counter-hegemonic project of post-colonial theory. In addition, the article aims at considering the problem of relations between post-colonial theory and the Communist concept of colonial revolution. Therefore, the article makes a special emphasis on Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (1961/1963) in order to show how the development of the problems of colonial revolution, which mainly took place within the third tradition of the Communist thought, was combined with the innovative psychoanalytical approach, thus putting the intellectual tools of the first (Gramscian) tradition centre stage in the post-colonial agenda.

### Safarov’s Plebeian Revolution

Georgy Safarov, a prominent Bolshevik since 1908 and an affiliate of Vladimir Lenin and Grigory Zinoviev, held important political positions in Central Asia in 1919–1921 during the years of political and military struggle in the region—he was a member of several governing bodies whose task was to put Central Asia under the Bolsheviks’ control. In 1921, he summarized his practical experience on the theoretical level by publishing a paper entitled *Kolonial’naia revoliutsiia (Opyt Turkestana)* [Colonial Revolution (Experience of Turkestan)]. The following year, he published a book under the same title where he expanded his vision of the subject. Safarov’s work was successful, and he tried to solidify his reputation as an expert in colonial and national matters. In 1923, he published *Natsionalnyi vopros i proletariat* [National Question and Proletariat]. In the subsequent years Safarov was somewhat distracted by his participation in the



struggle for power within the Bolshevik party: in 1923–1924 as a staunch supporter of Grigory Zinoviev, he was among the leading Bolshevik theorists attacking Leo Trotsky. When in 1925 Zinoviev became a target for the attacks from Joseph Stalin and Nikolay Bukharin, Safarov again was at the forefront of the conflict. He played an important role as a member of the so-called “united opposition”, when Zinoviev, Trotsky and their supporters joined forces. After the defeat of the “united opposition”, he was arrested and exiled to Achinsk, but in 1928 he returned to Moscow and was permitted to work in the *Comintern*. In 1930, Safarov published his paper *Problema natsii i antiimperialisticheskie revoliutsii* [Problem of Nation and the Anti-Imperialist Revolutions]; just as ten years before, the paper was soon followed by a larger volume expanding the key points, entitled *Problemy natsionalno-kolonialnoi revoliutsii* [Problems of National-Colonial Revolution]. In 1934, after the murder of Sergey Kirov, Safarov was arrested again and was imprisoned—thus effectively putting an end to his career of a political theorist—until his execution in 1942.

What new ideas did Safarov bring to the general understanding of colonial revolution elaborated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the *Comintern*? He remained fiercely loyal to Kautsky’s economic approach to understanding the nation and relied on Kautsky’s theory for describing the present-day Western nation-states as outcome of the political and economic ascent of the bourgeoisie. In the course of the bourgeoisie’s rise, it consolidated the emerging common market by means of cultural and political control, and, in doing so, disposed of the political domination of feudal elites. However, globalization undermines the basis of nation-states effectively dissolving them within the larger trans-national economic complexes; the contradiction between the global economy and the political superstructures of the nation-states leads to permanent waves of military conflicts among the leading capitalist powers (here Safarov follows the analytical works of Lenin and Bukharin on imperialism). The bourgeoisie’s fight for national independency against the feudal empires used to be progressive, as it was paving the way for new capitalist formation, but nowadays nationalism turns out to be reactionary for reasons explained above. Sooner or later, economic progress will destroy national borders, replace national languages with the sole “language of international trade”, and bring about an “American mill of nations” on a global scale. Such transition is possible only after the global socialist revolution. These arguments are fully in line with the classical Kautskian vision of the national question.

However, speaking of colonial issues, Safarov takes on a different direction. He argued that colonial rule of capitalist powers over the backward feudal countries did not undermine the basis of feudalism in colonies, but rather *strengthened* it. Contrary to what the European Socialist Democracy believed colonialism did not have any developmental mission in the colonies. Safarov even wrote about the “blockage of economic development of colonies by imperialism” (Safarov, 1930, p. 77). Although this was, again, a commonplace of Leninist thought, Safarov masterfully expanded this point by dwelling on his own revolutionary experience in Central Asia: as he observed, in the colonies, even the social groups exploited by the metropolitan country became privileged oppressors. To be an industrial worker was a *privilege* in Central Asia. Thus, colonial Central Asia was suffering from three main types of exploitation:

the native feudal elites, the foreign (namely, Russian) capital, and the Russian settlers who literally seized the land and water from the natives.

While at home the bourgeoisie had dismissed feudalism and established formal equality of citizens before the law, in the colonies the situation was absolutely different. Colonial rule is based almost solely upon the brutal force—the overwhelming technical-military strength of the imperialists. Here “national inequality is simultaneously an estate, political inequality: for one, being a member of the ruling nation, has specific rights and privileges, while the others are stripped of a part of their rights or of any rights—like serfs lacking any rights under the feudal regime” (Safarov, 1931, p. 16; my translation from Russian—K. B.). For Safarov, the settlers and colonizers cannot be the backbone of revolution in a colony, even though they represent more progressive economic orders than the natives, many of whom are still nomadic. The conclusion is clear: the colonial revolution could only be exercised by the natives, who must both eradicate their own comprador and semi-feudal elite and drive the settlers and colonizers off the land.

But if there is no native working class, then what social force is capable of being revolutionary within the Marxist theory of proletarian revolution? Safarov was searching for an answer by reiterating the idea of “plebeian elements” referring both to Lenin and to Engels and striving to develop a more systematic theoretical approach. Safarov laid a special emphasis on this analogy—the imperialists are “attaching” the enslaved colonies to the production of raw materials just as feudal landlords were “attaching” serfs to the land (see: Safarov, 1931, p. 104), and putting them into ghettos. In other words, capitalism, while entering the global market, “retreats to the position of feudalism” (Safarov, 1931, p. 93; my translation from Russian—K. B.). This characteristic was apparently pejorative: the feudal system reproduced by imperialism on a global scale has nothing to do with the progress and must be demolished recklessly. The bourgeois revolution will not redeem the backward areas of the world, and the creation of “ordinary” nation-states with their respective capitalism is impossible for colonies: “What if complete hopelessness of the situation, tenfold the strength of the workers and peasants, opened us a possibility of a different transition to creation of the new prerequisites of civilization in regard to other European states?” (Safarov, 1930, p. 79; my translation from Russian—K. B.).

Thus, the revolutionary thrust of the exploited native plebeians is the only solution, for “political superstructure and culture are forming in the process of storm and onslaught of the masses not in a strict compliance with the turtle pace of economic development” (Safarov, 1930, p. 78; my translation from Russian—K. B.). Safarov sums up:

Anti-imperialist struggle gives birth to a long chain of social changes, political and cultural revolutions, which form the existence of backward peoples. Across all the historical leaps and “breaks of gradualness”, the clash between the “Lutheran-knightish” and “plebeian-Muntzerian” tendencies runs like a red thread. All these preliminary stages of revolutionary development are turning out to be in the final historical account the forms of their convergence with both

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the global socialist revolution and its most important pillar—the first socialist Soviet Union. (Safarov, 1930, p. 95; my translation from Russian—K. B.)

In other words, colonial revolutions, destructive and purging as they are, will open the way for the colonial nations to integrate directly into the Soviet system in their own distinctive manner. Of course, Safarov did not openly advocate the peasant war; rather, he emphasized the role of the rising proletariat of colonies. However, his favorite analogy, which presented colonies as collective serfs, his frequent references to the “plebeian-Muntzerian” movement (traceable, again, to Engels’s writings on the Peasant War in Germany), and his calls for an immediate revolutionary thrust in the colonies were indicators of his sympathy towards the idea of a peasant uprising.

The very term *plebeian* was borrowed by Safarov from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Obviously, Marx referred to *plebs* in a rather ambiguous way (Bourdin, 2013). In his recent work, Martin Breugh outlines the European tradition of plebeian politics (strangely enough, Breugh excludes Marx from the line of plebeian thinkers, while simultaneously including Giambattista Vico and Montesquieu, and he barely mentions Lenin or Mao at all, let alone Safarov): “It arises when people excluded from the *res publica* transform themselves into political subjects able to act in concert [...] The plebeian experience thus confirms the existence of communalist and agoraphile political traditions throughout Western political history” (Breugh, 2007/2013, p. 241). Santiago Castro-Gomez adds that during his early years Marx was moving away from an abstract, Hegelian republicanism towards exactly this kind of plebeian republicanism (Castro-Gomez, 2018, p. 25). The very manner of describing social structures by means of Roman historical analogies is in use even today (Ferguson, 2019, p. 15). In turn, Engels frequently spoke about “plebeian and proletarian ascetism” of Thomas Muntzer’s followers in *The Peasant War in Germany*:

The plebeian opposition consisted of ruined burghers and the mass of townsmen without civic rights—journeymen, day labourers, and the numerous precursors of the lumpenproletariat, who existed even in the lowest stages of urban development. The lumpenproletariat is, generally speaking, a phenomenon that occurs in a more or less developed form in all the so far known phases of society. (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 407)

Engels’s treatise played a pivotal role in making the concept of “plebeian elements” important for the Marxist tradition, especially when one talked about the revolutions of the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the period when the working class was absent from the historical scene. The mentions of “plebeian elements” or even “plebeian parties” entangled with the numerous references to the history of the French revolution are abundant in the works of Bolshevik political leaders including Lenin and Trotsky. Of course, this concept remained problematic as it was not clearly distinguished from the concept of “petty bourgeoisie”. One of Soviet social historians from the 1930s, Nikolay Lukin, explained the exact composition of these plebeian elements: the

waged workers (including seasonal workers), handicraftsmen, street traders and the lumpen-proletariat, that is, “porters, organ-grinders, jugglers, dog-shearers, beggars, etc.” (Lukin, 1934, p. 113; my translation from Russian—K. B.).

After achieving independence in the “plebeian-Muntzerian” way, how could former colonies evade being dependent upon Western capitalism in economic terms and secure themselves against what Trotsky later called the “intervention of cheap goods”? (Trotsky, 1936/1937, p. 17) Safarov responds by referring to Marxist classics: the proletariat will help its peasant brothers and sisters in creating a new, socialist economy. Surely, such help could be provided by the victorious European or American proletariat, but Safarov does not discuss such possibility; after all, that point would mean that the colonial revolution depends upon the European revolution, and that, without the European working class, any revolutionary thrust in the colonies would be futile. Thus, Safarov envisioned that the Soviet Union would assist the newly emerging peasant revolutionary countries, just as Soviet Russia assisted the native peoples of Central Asia, in the collectivization of the country and industrialization of the cities. Thus, Bolshevik experience of managing a socialist revolution and the subsequent socialist build-up in a colony became for Safarov a pattern for all colonial countries struggling for liberation. In a peculiar way, he brought together the sympathy towards the uncompromising struggle for liberation in colonies and the sheer admiration for the USSR’s growing industrial strength. The rhetoric of violent liberation was intertwined with the vision of industrial power. As Modest Kolerov has recently noticed, “awareness of the technological and social backwardness of the USSR gave a touch of national liberation to the pathos of the Bolsheviks” (Kolerov, 2017, p. 129; my translation from Russian—K. B.).

It was Safarov who put together a set of rather unsystematic *Bolshevik/Comintern* ideas on colonial revolution to develop a theory of anti-colonial peasant war (though it was never presented as a single theoretical construction, partly due to Safarov’s passionate style of arguing). While the very concept of peasant uprising as a way to revolution in a colony was widespread among the *Bolshevik* theorists, Safarov diligently devised a suitable analogy presenting the whole revolutionary struggle in colonies as a “plebeian-Muntzerian” uprising thought in terms of a peasant war against the feudal regime. Safarov drew a totally different conclusion from the one made by Manabendra Roy, who insisted that the Indian revolution was possible only due to the fact that capitalism presumably had done much to develop India’s industry, or the ideas expressed by Karl Radek in regard to China. He also was the first Communist thinker to postulate the grave differences between the colonizers and colonized; the former, even being exploited workers, had a privileged status in a colony.

Another important aspect of Safarov’s vision of the national-colonial revolutions was his position of an external observer. Being in the middle of the revolutionary events of Central Asia, he nevertheless remained an emissary from Moscow, and, deliberating on the Chinese and Indian revolutionary movement, he was still pursuing the Soviet political line, that is, any revolutionary movement in the world was seen as inferior in comparison with the safety of the Soviet state. From this perspective, the permanent and fierce fight in the colonies could also be seen as

a tool of providing protection for the USSR on the grounds that the imperialists being busy in colonies would not dare to attack the Soviet Union. However, in the mid-1930s the whole colonial agenda faded into the background in Soviet Marxism and in the *Comintern*: The Chinese Revolution was in the stalemate, and the war in Europe was approaching, so for the Red Moscow the very colonial powers started to be seen as desirable potential allies against the aggressive Fascist bloc. In turn, it led to the disappointment in the *Comintern*'s liberatory rhetoric, for most of the colonial world was under the domination of those very "peaceful democracies" whom the Red Moscow tried to approach as allies.

### Mao's Protracted War

While Moscow started to pay less attention to the colonies, the struggle in colonies was going on, with China as the largest battlefield. The country nominally united by Kuomintang was still suffering from the civil war as neither the military leaders nor the Communist party submitted to Chiang Kai-shek's rule. Soon, internal tensions attracted hostile attention from abroad. Since 1931, Japan started to invade China, and in 1937 the war was declared openly. The Communist forces led by Mao Zedong, who at the time strengthened his position as the leader of the Communist Party of China, retreated to the Western regions of China in 1935. From the city of Yanan, Mao ruled the whole Shaan–Gan–Ning border region (since 1936 Communists and Kuomintang became allies against the Japanese). The period of isolation in Yanan is considered to be as the most productive in Mao's political career. Here, he developed his famous theory of protracted war, a great revive of the peasant war or, as Carl Schmitt called it, the *Theory of the Partisan* (Schmitt, 1962/2007). In 1938, a series of lectures of Mao Zedong were published under the title *On Protracted War*.

Mao was familiar with the statements of the *Comintern* on colonial revolution and warfare, as well as with the overall Leninist approach to the problem of just and unjust wars. Mao's ideas became an important step in the development of anti-colonial thought under the Leninist (or the *Comintern*) aegis, especially given the fact that by the end of the 1930s, the Moscow theorists were much less interested in the anti-colonial struggle than ten years before. Unlike Safarov, Mao was not interested at all in the problem of the indigenous-settler relationships (most probably since China was not colonized by settlers either from the West or from Japan), and he did not use the very term "colonial" (let alone "national-colonial") revolution. But even if Mao did not use this word, he surely elaborated the concept, producing a comprehensive analysis of colonial revolution interpreted as a liberatory war and reflecting the Chinese Communists' unique experience of protracted partisan war against the Kuomintang and Japanese invaders. Mao's elaboration contributed greatly to the formation of a new understanding of colonial revolution (already outlined in Safarov's works) as a liberatory anti-colonial war. Of course, since 1927, the primary enemy of the Communists in China was Kuomintang, but soon that political enemy was re-imagined as an agent of imperialists. As Mao postulated already in his *Why is it the Red Political Power Can Exist in China* (1928),

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regime of the new warlords of the Kuomintang remains a regime of the comprador class in the cities and the landlord class in the countryside; it is a regime which has capitulated to imperialism in its foreign relations and which at home has replaced the old warlords with new ones, subjecting the working class and the peasantry to an even more ruthless economic exploitation and political oppression. (Mao, 1965a, p. 63)

In *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War* (1936), he theorized over the laws of the revolutionary war, which could be either a "class war" or "national war", in the specific conditions of "semi-colonial China" (Mao, 1965a, pp. 179–181). In *Bankruptcy of the Idealist Concept of History* (1949), Mao provided a concluding description of China's revolution as a liberatory war against the "imperialists" and their "running dogs":

In its first battle, this scientific and revolutionary new culture acquired by the Chinese people defeated the Northern warlords, the running dogs of imperialism; in the second, it defeated the attempts by another running dog of imperialism, Chiang Kai-shek, to intercept the Chinese Red Army during its 25,000-*li* Long March; in the third, it defeated Japanese imperialism and its running dog, Wang Ching-wei, and in the fourth, it finally put an end to the domination of China by the United States and all other imperialist powers as well as to the rule of their running dogs, Chiang Kai-shek and all the other reactionaries. (Mao, 1961, pp. 456–457)

The fact that certain "running dogs" were at times seen as allies (as was the Kuomintang during the struggle against the Japanese invasion) did not affect the key ideas of Mao's military-revolutionary strategy.

Indeed, in his works of the late 1930s, Mao examined the possibility of success in a colonial liberatory war. He followed (perhaps unintentionally) Safarov in saying that imperialism rules colonies by sheer force; therefore, colonial countries cannot just develop their respective economies under the colonial yoke to a degree when they will become powerful enough to compete with the imperialists. The Marxist understanding of power prevented them from considering that the spirit or enthusiasm of uprising would outweigh the imperialists' war machines with their technological sophistication. Mao's answer was that, even though Japan was stronger in purely military terms, China was much larger and more capable to wage a war of attrition; that is why the liberation war was a "protracted war". The key issue was to mobilize the mass of peasantry:

Besides employing trained armies to carry on mobile warfare, we must organize great numbers of guerrilla units among the peasants [...] The Chinese peasants have very great latent power; properly organized and directed, they can keep the Japanese army busy twenty-four hours a day and worry it to death. It must be remembered that the war will be fought in China, that is to say, the Japanese army will be entirely surrounded by the hostile Chinese people. (Mao, 1967, p. 10)

When the peasant mass entered the battlefield, the preponderance of China in terms of military force would be ensured.

However, Mao was aware that there were lots of examples when smaller countries conquered larger ones—like in the case of Britain against India, or Italy against Ethiopia. Mao made great efforts to explain how China could avoid the same fate as Ethiopia or India. When Italy attacked, Ethiopia proved unable to defend itself, while the expectations of the imperialists' collective attempt to prevent Italy from devouring it also failed. According to Mao, the situation in China was different, for it was much more developed economically and socially than India during the British conquest or Ethiopia during the Italian invasion. In addition, British imperialism was dynamic and rising, while Japanese imperialism was declining and decaying. Japan was internally weak, Mao insisted, and the revolution in Japan was an important factor for planning and waging the war of liberation. In speaking so, he echoed the classical approaches of the Leninist theory of war. In addition, the international situation by the end of the 1930s had changed totally:

The popular movements in the world today are developing on a scale and with a depth that are unprecedented. The existence of the Soviet Union is a particularly vital factor in present-day international politics, and the Soviet Union will certainly support China with the greatest enthusiasm; there was nothing like this twenty years ago. All these factors have created and are creating important conditions indispensable to China's final victory. (Mao, 1967, p. 20)

Thus, the three main factors made Chinese victory inevitable: the strategic advantage in resources (or, simply, China was bigger); the internal weakness of Japanese capitalism; and the international situation—both the existence of the Soviet Union and the possibility of anti-Japanese coalition. Among these three factors, the mobilization and unity of China's forces was the most important one; the two others (the revolution in Japan and international coalition against Japan) could reduce the time and costs required for the final victory (see: Mao, 1967, p. 107). Importantly, Mao often stressed that the war against Japan would be long and disastrous: even though the final victory would inevitably be achieved, no one could expect a fast and easy victory. The process of the war of liberation here was—just as in Safarov's works—constitutive.

However, in the way he envisioned the events to follow after the defeat of the imperialists, Mao differed from Safarov. By the end of the 1930s, Mao embraced the concept of *new democracy*. He referred neither to Lenin or Stalin, nor to the *Comintern's* directives and resolutions (see: Smirnov, 2012, p. 383). However, the intellectual roots of this concept are quite clear. In 1928, striving to support the integration of the Communist party of China and Kuomintang, the *Comintern* proposed the slogan of “people's democratic dictatorship”. It was heavily criticized by the leftist opposition within the *Bolshevik* Party, including Safarov. However, the terms of “democratic dictatorship” and “Sovietization” were rather vague. *New*



*democracy* ought both to unite different social groups (that was what the *Comintern* pursued under the banners of “popular fronts”) and to facilitate the accelerated development of capitalism in China. The latter resembled the older *Comintern* politics towards Chinese revolution in 1927, when Moscow leaders insisted on integrating communists into the Kuomintang structure, but at that time with the Communist party at the helm, which was seen as the only way out of backwardness and poverty. Unlike Safarov’s ideas of the national-colonial revolution driving subjugated nations directly to socialism and skipping the phase of the bourgeois republic with the support from the already existing “workers’ state”, Mao’s *new democracy* meant to serve as a specific bourgeois phase of development under control of the Communist political force. Apparently, the leaders of the Chinese communists didn’t believe in any substantial assistance from the Soviet state; so, Mao prepared not for the skipping of the capitalist phase in Chinese history, but for a long period of co-existence and cooperation with their political opponents as well as with the Western powers.

Thus, Maoist thought of the 1930s–1940s creatively combined two concepts: the idea of “democratic dictatorship”, which was already permanently present in the *Comintern*’s political assessments since the late 1920s; and the idea of peasant war, which coincided with what Safarov wrote about the “plebeian” movement. These key ideas were now reiterated in the light of Mao’s own experience of a long peasant war, semi-partisan fighting, and prolonged isolation in Yanan, giving birth to the specific concept of peasant war: “The Communists’ arrangements for the peasants, and their provisions to the uprooted rural people serving the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army, permitted them to inspire the peasants to see the war as a quest to restore the values of family and village life and to support the great leap from local, self-defensive insurgency to national revolutionary war” (Thaxton, 2017, p. 55). Most probably, these political concepts also emerged from the influence of earlier Sun Yat-Sen’s thought on democracy (Bedeski, 1977, pp. 340–341). This was a distinctly—yet recognizably Marxist and, more strictly, Communist—Maoist concept of colonial revolution and liberatory war.

Even as the People’s Republic of China was affected heavily by the Soviet experience since the late 1940s, Mao was permanently aware of the undesirable effects of direct intellectual exports from Moscow. Historically, it turned out that a decisive role was played by the international factor rather than by China’s own mobilization of resources, as the Japanese Empire was destroyed by the international coalition, though the Japanese army was unable to conquer China by force, just as Mao predicted. But events went a different way:

In developing the strategy of the new democratic revolution, Mao Zedong expected the support from the USA to rebuild the economy of the new democratic state after the war. Instead of lending such support, the USA openly intervened into the Chinese civil war on the side of the Kuomintang, providing ostensible military and financial help to Chiang Kai-shek. Thus, real support to Mao Zedong was provided by the Soviet Union, which assisted in creating a military-revolutionary base in Manchuria. (Smirnov, 2009, p. 27; my translation from Russian—K. B.)

The resulting changes in political attitudes strongly resembled the ideas which Safarov put forward in his *Problems of National-Colonial Revolution*: The Soviet Union started to provide massive assistance to drive the Chinese economy forward<sup>1</sup>. For example, the concept of peasant war proved incompatible with the radical land politics of *dekulakization*, which some of the Stalinist factions of the Chinese Party were trying to pursue (Womack, 1982, pp. 135–137). In the 1945 speech entitled *On Coalition Government*, Mao proclaimed:

Some people fail to understand why, so far from fearing capitalism, Communists should advocate its development in certain given conditions. Our answer is simple. The substitution of a certain degree of capitalist development for the oppression of foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism is not only an advance but an unavoidable process. It benefits the proletariat as well as the bourgeoisie, and the former perhaps more. It is not domestic capitalism but foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism which are superfluous in China today; indeed, we have too little of capitalism. (Mao, 1965b, p. 283)

Thus, “new democracy” was rather meant to facilitate the capitalist development under the watch of the Communist party. Surely, Mao distrusted the bourgeoisie, that is why political control had to remain in the hands of the Communist party. Mao retained his concept of “new democracy”, albeit in a slightly different form. He emphasized in his 1949 work, *On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship*: “Who are the people? At the present stage in China, they are the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. These classes, led by the working class and the Communist Party, unite to form their own state and elect their own government” (Mao, 1961, pp. 417–418)<sup>2</sup>. Despite the fact that certain party members thought “new democracy” to be a transitory period for a couple of decades, its conceptual apparatus still serves as a symbol of social consolidation and concord in present-day China (see: Rudolph, 2021, p. 299).

The idea of protracted peasant war, which had liberating, emancipatory and democratic effects by itself, was a step in the same direction as Safarov’s plebeian uprising. While the final purpose, besides the national independence, was certainly economic and cultural development, the economic build-up itself was not considered to be a liberatory process; it was understood rather as a firmly controlled capitalist

<sup>1</sup> In the 1930s, the Soviet Union depended on the West for technological assistance, relying upon foreign cadres, technologies and equipment. During the First Five-Year Plan of China, the scale of the task was comparable, yet now all the foreign support came from the USSR, which alone played the same role as the United States and Germany together played for Soviet industrialization in the 1930s. 156 industrial objects were reconstructed or built from scratch with the Soviet assistance (see: Hanbing, 2010, p. 157). But while the industrial build-up was underway, the collectivization of the land was halted.

<sup>2</sup> Mao classified all political regimes in the world as different kinds of dictatorship: that is, the republics under the bourgeois dictatorship, republics under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and republics under the “joint dictatorship of several revolutionary classes”. Again, he closely followed the Leninist patterns in considering any republic as a dictatorship, but added to that his own specific treatment of the concept of the dictatorship of several revolutionary classes, a transitional political regime, which by the end of the 1920s was promulgated in the *Comintern* by Joseph Stalin and Nikolay Bukharin.

growth under the aegis of the triumphant Communist party—a vision rather similar to Lenin’s new economic policy, though in the presence of the Soviet neighbor it was reshaped heavily. Indeed, Stalin himself considered the Chinese position as a sort of an imitation of Soviet Russia’s new economic policy, and so did the number of influential Chinese party officials; those who insisted on forced emulation of the Soviet model were criticized harshly. National independence achieved by means of war rather than economic victory over backwardness was the key idea in Maoism at that time. Those ideas brought the Maoist concept of protracted war close to what Safarov envisioned, but there were two conceptual lines that differed in relation to the national bourgeoisie: while Safarov believed that the colonial bourgeoisie was feudalized and had to be swept aside, Mao—while using the very term “feudalism” in the same pejorative way as Safarov did—drew the line between the “good” and “bad” bourgeoisie, allowing for a sort of social consolidation to support independency. Of course, these distinctions remained part of the tradition stemming from the resolutions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the *Comintern*. Despite the differences, both approaches welcomed a broad social movement involving the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie, both were demonstratively hostile towards “feudalism”, and both insisted upon the possibility of winning the liberatory war against the imperialists and staging a revolution even in the absence of the revolution in the West.

### Fanon’s Counter-Hegemony

The intellectual and political context in which Franz Fanon’s writings appeared was quite different, but it bore certain similarities with the experience of Safarov in Central Asia and Mao Zedong in Yanan. Fanon’s political thought emerged in the context of the Algerian War, which, in its turn, was part of the broader frame of Africa’s liberation from colonial dependency. Fanon most probably was familiar with the resolution of the first four Congresses of the Communist International (Hudis, 2015, p. 79).

In his arguably most influential work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon described the process of colonization as brutal subjugation by sheer violence, pointing out that the settlers’ presence in colonies “was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 36). The conquest is inevitably followed by the psychological trauma, as the new masters turn the colony into a space of delusion. The subjugation strips the colonial peoples of their history: in colonies the settlers made history, and while they drove the social progress, they faced the “torpid creatures, wasted by fevers, obsessed by ancestral customs, form an almost inorganic background for the innovating dynamism of colonial mercantilism” (Fanon, 1964/1967, p. 51). For Fanon, “the colonial world is a world cut in two” (Fanon, 1964/1967, p. 38), and to revolt is to discover the grim truth behind the web of words so carefully woven by the imperialists:

After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his life—the forces of colonialism. And the youth of

a colonized country, growing up in an atmosphere of shot and fire, may well make a mock of, and does not hesitate to pour scorn upon the zombies of his ancestors, the horses with two heads, the dead who rise again, and the djinns who rush into your body while you yawn. The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom [...] What they demand is not the settler's position of status, but the settler's place. The immense majority of natives want the settler's farm. For them, there is no question of entering into competition with the settler. They want to take his place (Fanon, 1964/1967, p. 58)<sup>3</sup>.

This famous justification of violence is quite similar to the formulas of the *Comintern* thinkers and, in particular, to Safarov's vision of imperialism as a global reactionary force, which subjugates and governs colonies without any popular support, relying solely on its terrifying military strength, on dreadnoughts and airplanes. Inevitably, the colonial population, for whom this brutal conquest was aggravated by the psychological trauma, might only rely on violence, according to Fanon's premises.

As Fanon recognized the violent liberatory war against colonialism as the only solution for colonies, he faced the same question as Safarov and Mao: how could a colony be victorious against such monstrous war machine? Many authors considered the spirit of liberation and enthusiasm to be sufficient for a victory. For instance, Kwame Nkrumah in his *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* (1969), comparing the overall strength of the imperialists with that of the Independent States of Africa, was optimistic: "We possess the vital ingredient necessary to win—the full and enthusiastic support of the broad masses of the African people who are determined once and for all to end all forms of foreign exploitation [...] Against such overwhelming strength organized on a Pan-African basis, no amount of enemy forces can hope to succeed" (Nkrumah, 1969, p. 23). But Fanon, whose connections to Marxism made him sensitive to the realistic arithmetic of power, provided much more elaborated argumentation.

First, there are powerful rivals of the imperialists representing the socialist bloc, whose industrial and military strength somewhat undermines Western military superiority. Sebastian Kaempf stresses the Manichean aspects of Fanon's approach to colonialism presumably borrowed from the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre: "It was along the lines of Sartre that Fanon came to see a world made up of binaries as well as dialectics, and divided into two compartmental zones: the zone of the coloniser

<sup>3</sup> This apology of violence typically attracts students of Fanon's political philosophy; there was a debate on whether Fanon unconvincingly supports violence or not. Sebastian Kaempf summarizes Fanon's views of violence as following: "Precisely because colonialism represented a systematic and deliberate form of exploitation and dehumanization, it could only be overcome by force" (Kaempf, 2009, p. 140). There is a debate on whether Fanon was unconvincingly supporting the extreme violence of not, and some authors argued that "he was not, as is customarily thought, an advocate of the indiscriminate use of violence" (Jinadu, 1973, p. 256). L. Adele Jinadu, for instance, is trying to find an inconsistency in Fanon's analysis: "What Fanon probably overlooks, in effect, is the important fact that social injustice is not a defining characteristic of colonial rule. There is no logical contradiction in the notion of an 'enlightened' or 'benevolent colonialism'. Thus, Marx could, with respect to British rule in India, talk of the 'unconscious' benefits of colonial rule" (Jinadu, 1973, p. 261). Unfortunately, Jinadu totally overlooks the whole tradition of Leninist and Maoist thought which develops Marxist theory in an opposite way, and which definitely influenced Fanon's own writings.

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or settler and the zone of the colonised or native” (Kaempf, 2009, p. 140). In fact, Fanon analyzes the anti-colonial struggle in the context of confrontation between the capitalist and socialist blocs, which both stimulates violence and creates possibilities for liberation, since “all the jacqueries and desperate deeds, all those bands armed with cutlasses or axes find their nationality in the implacable struggle which opposes socialism and capitalism” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 78). The military and diplomatic confrontation of the two blocs was seen by Fanon as an important factor in the liberatory fight of colonies:

When Mr. Khrushchev brandishes his shoe at the United Nations, or thumps the table with it, there’s not a single ex-native, nor any representative of an underdeveloped country, who laughs. For what Mr. Khrushchev shows the colonized countries which are looking on is that he, the *moujik*, who moreover is the possessor of space rockets, treats these miserable capitalists in the way that they deserve”. (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 78)

Second, within the very colonialist camp there are forces which cannot support older, militaristic ways of control, preferring milder methods of ensuring their hegemony over former colonies. Fanon’s vision of victory in a colonial revolt was different from what Mao postulated. While Mao expected three factors to play—that is, China’s impressive domestic resources, Japan’s internal weakness, and the changing international situation—Fanon believed that the victory was possible due to internal changes within the very structure of imperialism. Though it conquered the colonies with a “great array of bayonets”, it cannot rely upon sheer strength anymore. Surely, the confrontation of capitalism and communism creates new possibilities for colonial liberation, but the key factor is the change within the capitalist order itself. Fanon even draws a historical parallel: once German Nazism turned Europe into a “veritable colony”, and now Germany has to pay reparations. However, such payments did not prevent Germany from re-integrating into the European economic system; the West was in need of economically healthy and strong Germany. The same will happen to the Third World:

The colonies have become a market. The colonial population is a customer who is ready to buy goods; consequently, if the garrison has to be perpetually reinforced, if buying and selling slackens off, that is to say if manufactured and finished goods can no longer be exported, there is clear proof that the solution of military force must be set aside. A blind domination founded on slavery is not economically speaking worthwhile for the bourgeoisie of the mother country. The monopolistic group within this bourgeoisie does not support a government whose policy is solely that of the sword. What the factory owners and finance magnates of the mother country expect from their government is not that it should decimate the colonial peoples, but that it should safeguard with the help of economic conventions their own “legitimate interests”. Thus, there exists a sort of detached complicity between capitalism and the violent forces which blaze up in colonial territory. (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 65).

From here, a new strategy of imperialism emerges, replacing bayonets with compromises: “Their purpose is to capture the vanguard, to turn the movement of liberation toward the right, and to disarm the people: quick, quick, let’s decolonize. Decolonize the Congo before it turns into another Algeria” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 70).

The thrust was based upon the marginal social groups. As Clyde Barrow emphasizes, “Fanon was the first political theorist influenced by Marx to seriously revisit the problem of the lumpenproletariat after the Russian and Chinese revolutions” (Barrow, 2020, p. 87). The weak, greedy and corrupted bourgeois elite, which emerged within the system of colonial rule, will be unable to establish strong and healthy national states (Eyo & Essien, 2017, p. 69). Therefore, colonies will remain economically dependent producers of raw materials, or—to use Safarov’s analogy—will be “attached” to particular types of raw materials just as serfs were attached to the land: “The national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise” (Fanon, 1964/1967, p. 154). Moreover, Fanon was aware that while colonial rule by force is collapsing, the rising “middle-class bourgeoisie” of former colonies might easily provoke a period of inter-African wars (see: Fanon, 1964/1967, p. 186). The African countries, now emerging as formally independent nation-states, will compete with each other, triggering the wave of militant nationalism: “If the national bourgeoisie goes into competition with the Europeans, the artisans and craftsmen start a fight against non-national Africans [...] From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 156). Of course, imperialists will use tensions between African countries trying to increase their dependency upon former masters, especially in relation to the cultural and ethnic differences of the northern and southern parts of the continent.

Taking all that into account, Fanon envisaged no place for the middle-class in the emerging African states: “The combined effort of the masses led by a party and of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles ought to bar the way to this useless and harmful middle class” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 175). That’s why he was proposing “African Unity”, that is, “a principle on the basis of which it is proposed to achieve the United States of Africa without passing through the middle-class chauvinistic national phase with its procession of wars and death-tolls” (Fanon, 1961/1967, p. 187). As Derek Wright puts it, “the continentalist turned white racialisation of black identity to serve the purposes of a spurious cross-cultural unity” (Wright, 1986, p. 680). The racial boundaries will become the basis for the creation of a state that will unite the whole continent—though Fanon was aware of the differences between the northern and sub-Saharan parts of Africa, he believed that the common traumatic legacy of colonial rule will contribute to bringing different parts together. In addition, the slogan of the United States of Africa surely echoed the slogan of the European Socialist Democracy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely, the United States of Europe.

This new state will be strong enough to protect itself against the sweeping economic penetration of former colonial powers. Of course, that might result in a European blockade, aimed at throwing Africa back to the new Middle Ages and starvation without the access to European technologies, capitals and engineers. The

socialist alternative, though Fanon was rather sympathetic towards Soviet socialism, seemed inappropriate to him as well. He was skeptical towards any sort of the “Great Leap Forward” to spur industrialization in a single country: “Let’s be frank: we do not believe that the colossal effort which the underdeveloped peoples are called upon to make by their leaders will give the desired results. If conditions of work are not modified, centuries will be needed to humanize this world which has been forced down to animal level by imperial powers” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 100). He emphasizes:

There is no question of a return to Nature. It is simply a very concrete question of not dragging men toward mutilation, of not imposing upon the brain rhythms which very quickly obliterate it and wreck it. The pretext of catching up must not be used to push man around, to tear him away from himself or from his privacy, to break and kill him. No, we do not want to catch up with anyone. (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 314)

Fanon saw colonial dependence not only as a system of subjugation, which permanently reproduces backwardness, but mostly as a psychological trauma, which means that colonial countries need no economic strategy of development but a psychological remedy. Here, the contrast with the Communist thought—be it Safarov’s national-colonial revolution, or Mao’s “new democracy”—is remarkably ostensible.

## Conclusion

In answering the question of how the colonial revolution is possible, different authors, following the resolution of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the *Comintern*, developed similar approaches. The vision of a peasant, “plebeian”, anti-feudal war along with the analysis of internal contradictions within the imperialist camp create for Safarov, Fanon and other authors the very possibility of victory. Fanon thought that the great *jacquerie* of colonial people against the powerful imperialist exploiters could be won due to the three main factors: the internal changes in the very social organization of capitalism; the specific spirit of freedom that inflames the subjugated (similar to the spirit of the Spanish guerillas who fought Napoleon); and the confrontation of socialism and capitalism that undermines the positions of the West. This triad is similar to the three factors of victory in Mao’s “protracted war” as well as to the broader intellectual framework once set by the *Comintern* thinkers in the Interbellum: the combination of factors internal for the oppressed (partisan warfare); for the oppressor (weakness of Japan in Mao’s writings and domestic changes in Western politics in Fanon’s texts); and the overall context of international relations, in which the Soviet Union plays a special role. Colonialism was stripped of any progressive connotations and thought to be an ultimate evil perpetuating the backwardness of colonies. Thus, colonial revolution was reduced to the liberatory war against colonialism, and as such it no longer depended upon the revolution in the West; it was not even an issue of the colony’s own economic development.



The social-economic development which was supposed to protect former colonies from an indirect “economic intervention” after the war remained a problem for the concept of colonial revolution all the way from Central Asia to Algeria. Everything that Soviet and Chinese thinkers could advise was forced economic development. Safarov thought that the solution was the direct economic support from the Soviet state, thus effectively replacing the expectations of the European revolution with the hope for Soviet assistance. Mao to some extent also relied on the help from abroad; nevertheless, the key issue of “New Democracy” was to use domestic capitalists to drive the economy forward under the strict control of the “democratic dictatorship”. Later Mao also adopted the strategy of the “Great Leap Forward”, and even after that remained faithful to the Stalinist-type planned economy. Fanon’s dream of a large, united African state standing against the imperialists and reducing the chauvinist tensions resembles the visions of powerful communist states of the Soviet Union and China. However, he defied the idea of rapid modernization under the aegis of socialism—whether in the form of the “Great Leap Forward” or as a reliance upon the direct Soviet aid. Fanon also had no trust in the native bourgeoisie. Emphasizing the need for psychological change rather than for “chasing someone” technologically and economically, Fanon envisioned a different path, the one which eventually led to the emergence of the post-colonial paradigm with its focus upon cultural therapy rather than liberatory action, and on subalternity rather than oppression. Such interpretation of Fanon’s ideas has been recently developed by Ranjana Khanna (Khanna, 2013, pp. 134–138). Arif Dirlik summarizes it the following way:

Escaping into the Second World of socialism, or “de-linking” from the system, were the only options available, and neither offered a satisfactory solution of the problems faced by colonial and neo-colonial societies. The first implied escaping one kind of colonialism to be entrapped in another, but without the structural integration that came with incorporation in capitalism, which at least brought some benefits with it. The other alternative meant opting out of the system only to be isolated, while leaving the system intact. (Dirlik, 2002, p. 435)

The formula of “another kind of colonialism” seems to be inadequate to grasp the proper relations within the socialist camp, but those former colonies and semi-colonies—for instance, Vietnam or Cuba—which entered the global socialist system in the 1950s surely were treated within the second tradition of orthodox Leninism, in which peripheral former colonies were seen as inferior and undeveloped—the same arrogant approach which enraged Enver Hodzha in his encounter with the Soviet leadership in Moscow. Regardless of the terms, the “escaping into the Second World” was not a simple option to choose or reject; such “escape” demanded certain historical, political and geographical conditions. Unlike the Soviet and Chinese cases, the wave of revolutions in Africa and Southern Asia mostly swept over the countries under direct control of colonial empires, while the Soviet Union was far away, both geographically and culturally. Even the victory in war left former colonies vis-à-vis powerful capitalist countries, which would be able to corrupt and indirectly control the

greedy and stupid native bourgeoisie. Development of the theory of colonial revolution was mainly connected with the *Bolshevik* Party, where it was also used as a part of international politics securing the safety of the Soviet Union, and with the Chinese Communist Party, where it opened the way for a victorious liberatory war and national revolution. It is important that these two states had a common border and, so to say, were territorially close to each other.

Fanon's rejection of accelerated economic modernization as incompatible with the essence of the colonial revolution—the great *jacquerie*—was not an isolated phenomenon. Sanjay Seth connects the emergence of post-colonial theory in India with the Maoist Naxalite movement in India rather than with the overall disappointment in socialism. Seth argues that by the mid-1960s, a new way of thinking about revolution had arisen,

one more willing to use Marxism for a critique of Enlightenment, than to see Marxism as the culmination and fulfilment of Enlightenment rationalism; and one alert to the possibility that anti-colonial nationalism and the nation-states to which it gave birth may not have been the answer of the oppressed to their subordination, but yet another form of bondage to modern European knowledge and its forms of construing politics and community. (Seth, 2006, p. 603)

The Naxalites developed the extreme form of *jacquerie* but the post-colonial Indian thinkers like Homi Bhabha substituted the Maoist organization with the “denial of organizational policy”, as “ambivalence is understood as the extent of politics” (Hutnyk, 2003, pp. 484–485). Not striving to “catch up with anyone”, unwilling (or unable) to “escape into the Second World”, post-colonial thinkers developed a specific strategy of complex relations with the former colonial powers, in which “the humiliated ones” would be able to pursue their own “counter-hegemonist” strategy. These relations were no longer determined by the sheer force of imperialists, and from that point Gramscian patterns became applicable to discuss and reinterpret transitional experience (Bentouhami, 2014, p. 118). As Arif Dirlik points out, “this new emphasis helps give voice to the victimized but, in the process of rescuing the colonized from voicelessness, also blurs the depth of the victimization colonialism visited upon its ‘objects’” (Dirlik, 2002, p. 433). Indeed, nowadays, postcolonial theory is criticized from the position of decolonization for reproducing the colonialist structures of modernity with its strict division of object and subject (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, pp. 130–132).

The theory of colonial revolution, which goes back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the *Comintern*, presented colonialism as an ultimate evil, incapable of bringing any progress to its victims. Colonial revolution was theorized by those Communist authors of the 1920s who were inclined to find conditions under which such action could lead to a victory (Safarov was the most consistent there) as a national-liberatory war against the colonial regime that not only galvanizes everything reactionary and feudal in colonies, but also operates on the basis of sheer power—dreadnoughts and airplanes, without a proper social base or consent within the colony. In addition, the possibility to move directly to socialism was provided by the existence of the Soviet

Union, capable to help former colonies in economic, political, and military spheres. To win the war meant to succeed in the revolution, though—most probably—the ideas of Safarov and other Soviet thinkers were also motivated by the desire to improve the international positions of the isolated Soviet state. But with the theoretical and practical triumph of Mao, the strategy of a “protracted” peasant war became globally recognized; the theory of colonial revolution as a liberatory war turned out to be the working one. Both the USSR and China pursued forced economic development, striving to outperform the capitalists. But as the limits of the Second World were unable to broaden endlessly, the theorists of the new revolutions in colonies strove to discover a possibility to re-enter the relations with the former colonial powers. As we saw in the case of Fanon’s deliberations on Europe’s possible “reparations” to undo the damage done by the colonial regime, the radical break with the ex-masters was followed by entering the relations of hegemony, based on persuasion and consent rather than violent governance by the “great array of bayonets”. These new relations were described in Gramscian terms of a long-term struggle over hegemony rather than in terms of forced economic build-up in the form of Stalinist industrialization or Maoist “Great Leap Forward”. To sum up, the comparison of Safarov and Mao with Fanon shows how the theory of colonial revolution as a national-liberatory war outgrows its initial sphere of use, leading the colonial peoples from the rule of sheer violence either to spaces of socialist planned autarky or to counter-hegemonic hybridity within the globally reaching capitalism.

The historical-geographical peculiarities still influence the development of post-colonial studies. Today, the post-colonial thought is associated mostly with Southern Asia and Africa, the former colonies of British and French empires, while Russia and China as the former “Second World” and the key locations in the early development of the theoretical approach to colonial revolution are underrepresented in this field. When post-colonial studies emerged in the 1970s, the Soviet Communists, who once stood at the roots of this intellectual adventure, definitely lost sensitivity towards colonial issues, as illustrated by Aleksander Gordon’s book on Fanon (Gordon, 1977). The subject of this book is the “national-liberatory struggle” rather than “colonial revolution”; the legacy of the *Comintern* is not mentioned at all, while Fanon is characterized exclusively as a “humanist”; his apology of violence is downplayed, and he is compared favorably with Jean-Jacque Rousseau. The subsequent collapse of the USSR and severe damage to the reputation of Communism changed things dramatically; on the one hand, the former Soviet Union is studied now among other colonial empires, and on the other hand, the former center of the “Second World” became part of the “poor North”, borrowing Madina Tlostanova’s term. The things are different in China. Recently, Daniel Vukovich pointed at the fact that the very post-colonial agenda in Chinese academia is different from the similarly named approaches in South Asia or Africa:

The mainland intellectual political culture (to use a phrase from Said) is itself in many ways postcolonial in two fundamental senses. It is deeply concerned with “becoming-the-same” as the modern, advanced West (if not outperforming

it and “winning”) and with never forgetting—via education and propaganda institutions—the era of national humiliation, that is, the era of near-colonialism, the collapse of the dynastic system, disunity and chaos, and Japanese invasion [...] Importantly, much of the Chinese new left also breaks with a major political plank in Western and global political thinking: it is resolutely pro-state and seeks to retain and enhance, not cut back or avoid, state capacity. (Vukovich, 2017, pp. 149, 153)

There is sound critique of post-colonial paradigm from the Chinese authors:

It is not wrong that post-colonialism pays attention to “uncovering the secret” and “decoding” Western cultural hegemony. The problem is that it unilaterally emphasizes the importance of language on decolonization of thought and addicts itself to discourse, but cares little about the social, political, and economic system and other forms of social practice. (Yang & Zhang, 2006, p. 293)

The growth of China’s technological and economic strength and its increasing “economic colonization” across Africa and Eastern Asia, which is yet to be considered through the lens of post-colonial theory, might become a decisive factor to re-evaluate the concepts of coloniality and dependence in the near future, so some new twists to the century-old tale of colonial revolution are to be expected.

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